

In his conscience he knows that he has not violated the law of the land.

But that is not all. The oath proposed by the gentleman from Cecil (Mr. Scott) contains the most extraordinary proposition that ever was made in a legislative hall since the world was governed, not even among the Hottentots, Hindoos, Seminoles, or barbarians. A man is obliged to swear to his thoughts before he can be permitted to exercise a civil right. It is a proposition only fit to govern demons in the infernal regions. It is an insult in my opinion to the house, to ask them to require a man to swear to the thoughts of all his past life before he can be permitted to enjoy the common privilege of a citizen anywhere except in a dungeon.

I am glad the gentleman from Baltimore city (Mr. Stirling) has not thought proper to introduce such an outrage in the form which he has submitted to the house. There is no appeal here to a man's conscience—not a particle of it. He swears that he has been "truly and loyally on the side of the United States against those in armed rebellion against the United States," and that he has "never directly or indirectly by word, act, or deed given any aid, comfort or encouragement to those in rebellion against the United States or the lawful authorities thereof."

I must agree that this is a very dangerous experiment for some gentlemen to take; for it not only involves the necessity of a man's changing his doctrine every month or two, in order to avoid the violation of his oath—for what is loyalty and support of the government to-day, is disloyalty to-morrow, but it amounts to this. It is but the other day that the President authorized a most distinguished man of his party, the man that made him President of the United States, to enter into correspondence with rebels upon terms of settlement, to see whether upon consultation any arrangement could be made. Under this oath he could not have begun even to correspond with them.

Do gentlemen want not only a nation without slavery, but a constitution better than that venerable instrument our fathers transmitted to us, a constitution which is to be in operation after the extradition of every human being south of Mason and Dixon's line? Is no man to be permitted to attempt to stop the war? Is the war to be waged until there is not a southern man left under the canopy of heaven? Has not blood enough flowed already? Have not myriads of the dead bodies of our fellow-citizens on both sides fallen? Have not hecatombs enough been slain to gratify the demon of desolation?

Were the President to send to-morrow a commission to propose terms of peace, your answer must necessarily be, I cannot accept terms of peace. The oath which I have taken forbids me to do anything under any circumstances which can possibly interrupt or form

in any way political combinations having for their object the dissolution or destruction of the Union. And strange to say, the oath is that they shall not allow the Union to be broken up and dissolved or the government thereof to be destroyed.

What is the government? I ask gentlemen here to put passion and feeling out of the question, and candidly, freely and quietly—I ask them in this temper and wish them to answer in this temper—I appeal to their consciences and ask them to consider what is the oath, what is our obligation, and what does our allegiance require of us? Is there any government in this country except that which the constitution and laws of the United States have formed for us in pursuance of power delegated to them by the people of the United States? What other government is there? It is a question you are bound to answer. You are asking us to swear to support it? You are asking us to swear that we never did anything but support it; and further, that we never will do anything but support it; or anything having for its object the destruction of it.

How can this be justified when a gentleman rises here and tells you that the great labor of his past life, that the great object of his solicitude has been to abolish the constitution, in other words the government, because it sustained slavery? It is a very serious question. It is not enough to go home and talk like the brawling politicians who sing out "negro," without knowing why or wherefore. It is not enough to go to the hustings and there in a state of excitement and passion to throw out some generalities, as the gentleman from Howard (Mr. Sands) has done. You must answer for these matters before posterity. You must answer for them to your own consciences before they get beyond you. You must answer for them to the people hereafter to be without passion, who will be calm, sober, whether they forget and forgive or whether they do not, not under the excitement of the present hour, and who will discover what it is that tears this country to its vitals. I wish with all my heart that that calm and thoughtful period may find that your conduct upon this occasion has merited the commendation which I am sure all of us would desire to receive.

I know of no obligation to the government of the United States. I know of no obligation to the State of Maryland, except those obligations which the charters constituting those governments have imposed. These I am ready to assume. There is not one of them that I am not willing to be bound by. But when additional claims are made, of a higher law, when principles are supported by which we are called to sustain the government outside of the constitution, a government never made by the people of the United States, a government the sole power of which is in the hands